



THE ACHIEVER

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Spellings: New “Commonsense” Approach to Implementing NCLB

Under a new approach to implementing *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB), states that can demonstrate they are raising student achievement and meeting several guiding principles can request additional flexibility to help them meet the law’s goals of getting every child to grade level by 2013–14. U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings announced last month at a meeting with the nation’s state education chiefs. The meeting was held at George Washington’s estate at Mount Vernon, Va., where three years ago the law was first introduced to the chiefs.

“Our goal is to take motivated students and give them the help and support they need to get through,” said Armando Gonzales II, the 10th-grade integrated science teacher at the California Academy of Mathematics and Science. At left, one of Gonzales’ students, Iván López, works on a project.

Secretary Spellings said the new flexibility with respect to state accountability plans or consolidated applications, titled “Raising Achievement: A New Path for *No Child Left Behind*,” builds on the fundamental principles of the law while taking into account the unique situations of states.

“Think of this new policy as an equation,” she said. “The principles of the law, such as annual testing and reporting of subgroup data, plus student achievement and a narrowing of the achievement gap, plus overall sound state education policies, equal a new, commonsense approach to implementation of *No Child Left Behind*....In other words, it is the results that truly matter, not the bureaucratic way that you get there. That’s just common sense, sometimes lost in the halls of the government.”

For more information about the new policy, including the secretary’s speech, visit www.ed.gov. For highlights of “Raising Achievement,” see Page 3.

The Variable That Makes The Difference

California Math and Science School Factors in Small Groups for Successful Equation

Imagine it’s the first day of high school and you know no one. You and approximately 165 other incoming freshmen assemble for a summer orientation program at your new school—the California Academy of Mathematics and Science (CAMS)—and are immediately divided into small groups called “cohorts.”

As you start talking to people in your cohort, you realize that they don’t know anyone either, because your classmates come from 80 middle schools spread over a 600-square-mile area.

“As the only one from my school,” recounted senior Erika Cuellar, “I was afraid of making friends; but with the cohort system, you make friends quickly.”

The cohort system is key to the support structure of CAMS, a public regional high school that encourages young people to enter the fields of math, science and engineering, according to Kathleen Clark, principal of the 2004 *No Child Left Behind* Blue Ribbon School.

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Photo by Ann Johansson



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Founded in 1990, the school is located on the campus of California State University, Dominguez Hills, and operates as a joint venture of the university's Chancellor's Office, the Long Beach Unified School District, and a consortium of 11 Los Angeles-area school districts.

From day one, students are members of a cohort—a small group of approximately 30 students who move together from class to class. Within their cohort, students build relationships and come to rely on one another. As the cohorts change each year, students come to know all of their classmates.

"While the teachers are always there to help us, we mostly get help from other students," explained senior Sajili Bacallo, who serves as a peer counselor.

The school also has an in-depth counseling program

that concentrates on both the academic and personal needs of students, as well as an academic review team comprising administrators, counselors and teachers.

"Our goal is to take motivated students and give them the help and support they need to get through," said Armando Gonzales II, the 10th-grade integrated science teacher.

Unlike similar magnet schools that admit students only from the top 10 percent of their eighth-grade class, CAMS accepts applications from students in the top 30 percent of their class.

During the interview process, students must present a math or science project they have completed. "We also consider students' intentions and motivations when making admission decisions," added Principal Clark.

The application process is ethnically blind, with the diverse student body occurring naturally due to the large numbers of ethnic minorities in schools from which CAMS draws students. Of the 618 students enrolled this year, approximately 26 percent are Asian; 31 percent, Hispanic; and 13 percent, African-American. More than 40 percent of the students qualify for free or reduced-price meals.

True to its emphasis on math and science, the freshman curriculum includes integrated math and science courses and an engineering course. Each student takes the same courses from the same teachers.

"By seeing each student, we can ensure that everyone has the same skills and that we work with students to fill in missing information," explained Gonzales. "We are able to integrate our class work across topics because everyone is learning the same thing in each course."

Freshmen spend approximately 30 percent of their time working in teams in each of their courses. "This helps

them to grow in all directions," explained Clark. "Students who are advanced in one subject receive enrichment activities, while students at the lower end benefit from the experience and knowledge of their more advanced peers."

The support network also bridges grade levels. "Upperclassmen often will say to underclassmen, 'Make sure you ask about that, because you really need to understand it,'" noted Vanessa Castillo, the 10th-grade integrated math teacher.

Students follow the same curriculum through their junior year, again with one teacher per course per grade. By the time they graduate, students have completed the equivalent of six years of science and four years of math and, on average, have earned 22 college credits. Ninety-four percent of CAMS graduates go on to four-year colleges.

The school day is not all work, however. CAMS students participate in sports and in more than 40 clubs, including the Key Club, the BioMed Club and the National Honor Society. This year, 50 CAMS students completed the Los Angeles Marathon, and the annual dance show and drama productions draw sell-out crowds.

The Robotics Club also is popular with students. As part of the F.I.R.S.T. (For Inspiration and Recognition in Science and Technology) Robotic Competition Organization, club members are given specific instructions and guidelines to produce, in six weeks, a robot that will perform competitive tasks.

"It takes a team of students to complete the challenge," said Castillo, club sponsor. "Some work out how the tasks should be completed, others look at human resources issues, while others tackle the engineering requirements." The CAMS team placed third in last year's regional competition.

"CAMS gives you a sense of belonging," summarized Cuellar.

Bacallo agreed. "Students respect each other and work cooperatively to help each other out. We have grown and united together, no matter where we came from in the beginning."

From left to right, CAMS students Darlene Aguilar, Randolph Garcia and Cinthya Osuna solve equations for their 10th-grade calculus assignment.

Photo by Ann Johansson

"We have learned a lot over the last three years as our infant law has matured. Like new parents, we all learn things as we go along, and as we get better at parenting."

U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings, in her remarks at a meeting with the nation's state education chiefs, George Washington's estate at Mount Vernon, Va., April 7, 2005.



**May 17
8:00–9:00 p.m. ET**

Education News Parents Can Use monthly broadcast will focus on science education. Visit www.ed.gov/news/av/video/edtv or call (800) USA-LEARN for details.

Close-Up: *No Child Left Behind* **A New Path for Raising Achievement**

Since its inception three years ago, *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) has dramatically changed American education by driving up achievement, increasing accountability, giving parents options and expanding the use of scientifically based instruction. At the same time, the U.S.

Department of Education has recognized the need to give states some alternatives in implementing the law, provided that they are increasing student achievement.

Last month, the Department announced a set of guiding principles, titled "Raising Achievement: A New Path for *No Child Left Behind*," which takes into consideration the unique situations of states. An example of this new approach is providing more flexibility to states to use alternate assessments and modified achievement standards for students with disabilities. States would be able to include, for accountability purposes, the test scores from such alternative assessments of students with persistent academic disabilities in determining adequate yearly progress, subject to a cap of 2 percent of the total tested population. By comparison, the current regulation permits states to give alternate assessments to students with significant cognitive disabilities, about 1 percent of all students. In addition, the Department is directing an additional \$14 million in immediate support for these students and, later this summer, would provide states with a comprehensive tool kit to help them identify and assess students with disabilities.

These principles will guide the Department's decisions when considering amendments to state accountability plans or consolidated applications, allowing for innovative methods for achieving the goals of *NCLB*. Below is a list of those principles, each followed by some examples of ways in which states may demonstrate their adherence to each principle.

Ensuring that students are learning:

- Adequate yearly progress (AYP) results;
- Significant improvement in overall achievement or in specific grade levels on state assessments, particularly for subgroups; and
- National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results that show reductions in the achievement gap.

Making the school system accountable:

- Assessments in reading/language arts and mathematics in grades 3–8 and once in high school by 2005–06;
- Alternate assessments and achievement standards based on content standards; and
- A four-year longitudinal graduation rate that can also be disaggregated by student subgroups.

Ensuring that information is accessible and parental options are available:

- Reader-friendly report cards accessible online or through other means (e.g., newspapers, direct mail);
- Schools identified for improvement before the beginning of the school year; and
- State-approved providers of supplemental services available in both urban and rural areas, as well as for special education and limited English proficient students.

Improving the quality of teachers:

- Reports on the percentage of public school classes taught by highly qualified teachers;
- Measures for rigorously evaluating teachers' subject-matter knowledge in each core academic subject taught; and
- Policies for ensuring that low-income students and their more affluent peers are comparably taught by highly qualified teachers.

In addition to considering a state's implementation of these principles, the Department may consider such factors as dropout rates or fiscal management in providing additional flexibility. For the full listing of these factors along with examples evidencing a state's implementation of the guiding principles, visit www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/raising/new-path-long.html.

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FIRST CLASS**



**"When it comes to
the education of our
children ... failure is
not an option."**

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH



ATTENTION, PUBLIC! **Seeking Comment About Nation's Special Education Law**

The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) is seeking public comment on the upcoming draft of regulations for the newly amended *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*. First enacted three decades ago, *IDEA* provides federal dollars to assist states and local communities in providing educational opportunities for approximately six million students with varying degrees of disability. The new legislation, reauthorized in December 2004, builds on the reforms of *No Child Left Behind*, including parental choice and academic results for students, while

addressing other issues that ensure a quality education for children with disabilities. This summer, the Department will host a series of public hearings across the country where individuals will have the opportunity to make comments: **June 6**, San Antonio, Texas; **June 17**, Nashville, Tenn.; **June 22**, Sacramento, Calif.; **June 24**, Las Vegas, Nev.; **June 27**, New York, N.Y.; June 29, Chicago, Ill.; and **July 12**, Washington, D.C. Suggestions may also be submitted electronically to comments@ed.gov. Please include "Comments on IDEA 2004" in the subject line of the message.

For specific locations for the public hearings as well as guidelines for the input process, visit the Department's Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 Web page at www.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/idea2004.html. Or direct questions to OSERS at (202) 245-7468. If a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) is needed, call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at (800) 877-8339.